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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2018  
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SUBJECT: BRV DEPORTS FARC GUERRILLA

REF: CARACAS 653

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Fernandez  
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) FARC chief of borders and finance, Gabriel Culma Ortiz A.K.A. "Guillermo" was turned over to Colombian authorities at the Tachira - Santander border on the evening of July 31. According to Colombia, Ortiz was a member of the unit responsible for the loss of Ingrid Betancourt and 14 other high value hostages. Local media also speculated that Ortiz also supplies a FARC unit holding another 22 hostages in Guaviare, Colombia. Members of the Venezuelan Guardia Nacional (GN) on border duty had detained Ortiz on July 25 attempting to enter using an expired letter of residency at Puerto Ayacucho in the southern state of Amazonas. According to Juan Colorado, (Protect) Press Officer of the Colombian Embassy in Caracas, Colombian security forces had Ortiz under surveillance and observed him take a boat across the Orinoco River into Venezuela. The GN denied knowing the identity of Ortiz until July 29 when he was turned over to the Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services (DISIP) and transferred to Caracas.

12. (C) Colorado informed PolOff that the BRV had shown "hermetic" cooperation only offering a fingerprint card of the prisoner until the morning of July 31 when Colombian Ambassador Marin was informed that Ortiz would be delivered to the Colombian consulate in Caracas that afternoon. Colorado confirmed media reports that when Ortiz was captured, Colombian soldiers presented themselves at the border to identify the guerrilla and request his custody. Ortiz was flow by DISIP officers to San Cristobal in the border state of Tachira where he was handed over to Colombian security forces from Cucuta. Vice Minister of Citizen Security Tarek El Aissami used the opportunity to denounce a "media campaign aimed at disrupting relations" between Colombia and Venezuela.

13. (C) Comment: Considering Venezuela's poor history over the custody (Reftel) of FARC rebels, the handover of Ortiz, while laudable, maybe part of an unfolding campaign by Chavez to rehabilitate his image internationally and domestically. Moreover, the FARC is very unpopular with Venezuelans and Chavez is focused on his party's prospects in November's sate and local elections.  
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